

# ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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## Group Trying to Save Redfield Middle School Finds Problems with Building (KARK, Channel 4)

Even though the White Hall School District is closing Redfield Middle School at the end of the school year, a group trying to save the building has high hopes of using it as a community center or charter school.

After a recent inspection, the group discovered what they call rotten, moldy, and deplorable conditions. Redfield Middle School is 75 years old, but the group says the problems they found with the building stem from years of neglect and shoddy repair work. Linda Banks says unless hundreds of thousands of dollars in renovations are made, the building will have to be demolished.

Banks and several others in the Redfield community cherish the school and would like to repurpose the building. "We're not going to give up. We want to continue to have programs and a place where our children can have sports and things like that."

But Todd Dobbins says none of that can happen with a flooded cellar, leaking roof, no hot water in the bathrooms, and mold and asbestos problems.

"This is not what I call maintained. It's deplorable."

Banks says the White Hall School District spent millions of dollars on other schools using taxpayer dollars she feels should have been used for repairs at Redfield. "We just feel like a stepchild. We feel like our children are treated with less value."

Superintendent Larry Smith says the decision to close Redfield Middle School is all about money, and the cost to keep up the building is too much. But Dobbins says it's going to cost the district money to tear the building down and conditions never should have gotten this bad. "This community has always been the red-headed stepchild."

Dobbins is upset to see a facility the community cares for so much neglected and destroyed. "They've had the purse strings, and they've not done a good job. In fact, they've done a horrid job."

Superintendent Smith says the building has been maintained and is in good shape for a facility that's 75 years old. He says a lot of the problems with the building simply cannot be fixed.

Starting next school year, Redfield students will be bused 20 minutes away to White Hall Middle School.

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## Pulaski County First Grader Brings Toy Gun to School (Arkansas CW TV News)

SHERWOOD, AR - An elementary school student is facing disciplinary action after bringing a toy gun to school this morning.

That's according to officials with the Pulaski County Special School District (PCSSD).

It happened at Jacksonville Cato Elementary.

The Sherwood Police Department says it got the call shortly after 10 o'clock.

The PCSDD says a first grade boy brought the toy gun to school. After another student saw it, the teacher sent the boy to the office.

Sherwood Police say the school will handle the matter.

It's not yet known what disciplinary action will be taken against the student.

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### **"Spending Cap" Bill Fails on House Floor (KARK, Channel 4)**

The Arkansas House of Representatives rejected a measure that would have tied state spending to disposable income.

By a 49-47 vote, HB1041 failed to advance to the Senate.

House majority leader Rep. Bruce Westerman (R-Hot Springs) had his bill skipped over twice because he wasn't sure he had the needed 51 votes for passage.

Before the vote Westerman acknowledged the success of the current state budgeting system, known as the Revenue Stabilization Act,

"I think we are better (than other states budgeting) but this gives us an opportunity to be best," Westerman says.

Governor Mike Beebe says he does not support the bill because the general assembly already has the ability to control government spending.

Westerman could bring up the proposal for another vote later in the session.

Schools and future teachers turn out for Tech's career fair

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### **Schools and future teachers turn out for Tech's career fair (The Courier, Russellville)**

The weather was more agreeable for a second chance to attend the annual education job fair on Thursday. The finest of Arkansas Tech's education program were on hand to network with teacher recruiters.

Dana Florian, director of Tech's Norman Career Services, was in charge of heading up the event. This was her second education fair since taking over as director.

Many of the institutions that planned to be at the fair were unable to accommodate the schedule change.

"This is the 19th annual educators fair," Florian said. "There were 44 institutions scheduled to attend, but due to the date change, stemming from in-climate weather, 30 were able to show."

"It's a fair for all education majors and non-traditional teacher licensing candidates," Florian said. "It's also a great opportunity to meet face to face and gather information."

Usually, the resume is left to tell the story, according to Florian. But the fair provides an upper-hand for students by allowing a time and place for potential employers and teachers to check if a position may promise a good fit.

"A great deal of preparation goes into the event," Florian said. "Career services provides resume' critiques as well as advise on professional clothing attire and interview tips."

Norman Career Services provides an effective variety of business and professional etiquette training for students and alumni preparing to search for employment.

"We will have an Engineering and Technology Fair in the W.O. Ballroom on April 10, from 9 a.m. till 12 p.m.," Florian said. "It will include computer science and information technology exhibitors as well," she added.

"I thought it was a really good fair and enjoyed it alot," said Amber Worley, an Early Childhood Education senior. "There were several good schools recruiting that were very friendly and informative."

Worley said she was recently asked for her hand in marriage by Justin Mishler. She is currently in the middle of an internship at Bryant's newest facility, Farm Hill Elementary.

"I hope my career will start with a full-time teaching job at Bryant Independent School District," she said. "They didn't say which grade is available, just that there are spots open in elementary."

"Arkansas Tech is our number one go to place," Russellville Schools assistant superintendent Alene Bynum said. "Tech does a great job with preparing teachers to teach the whole child."

The Russellville School District (RSD) facilitates teaching internships. According to Bynum, this is the most important job fair for RSD.

"We pull the largest number of interns from this fair," Bynum said. "We have a great partnership with Tech."

"Green Forest is 25 mile west of Harrison and the Mecca of the Ozarks," director of instruction at Green Forest School District Andrea Martin said.

"We have attended the Tech job fair for the last 10 years," said Martin. "We've had great success and the candidates are well prepared."

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### **Mayflower child slips out f school (Log Cabin Democrat, Conway)**

A Mayflower Elementary pre-schooler left school grounds alone Monday and crossed at least one parking lot and Highway 89 before she was found two blocks away, school and police officials said.

Mayflower Schools superintendent John Gray said the child "seized an opportunity to sneak out and run" when an employee supervising the child in a conference room stepped out of the room.

According to a Mayflower Police Department incident report, the child had been seated in the conference room due to behavioral problems.

The report states the school employee stepped out of the room to call the child's mother.

Gray said when the employee returned and found the girl was gone, she was immediately reported missing.

The report states school officials searched the building and initiated an intercom "all-call" before searching outside.

"We did everything. We notified agencies and told police of the situation. We made contact with the family," Gray said.

According to the incident report, a woman who saw the child on Locust Street made contact with her and called 9-1-1.

The woman told police the girl said she "was going home to her momma's."

Gray said the incident has caused the district to look again at safety measures for young students.

According to Gray, the school has an alarm system that is activated when an outer door opens from inside a Kindergarten classroom.

"In our Kindergarten room we have a special security system on the door. If you open the door an alarm goes off. We're looking at adding more of those to the building," he said.

Gray said doors of the school buildings are locked from the outside, but doors are unlocked leading out of the building due to fire codes.

"This district has met with the family, and we've discussed this child's needs and are currently looking at support services we can provide with a routine daily management of needs for the student," said Gray. "This is to help them overall educationally and to look at ways to ensure this child and other children cannot get out of the building so easily."

Gray said the child ran down a hallway past several classrooms and out of the door without being seen.

According to police, the girl's family is not seeking legal action against the school.

Gray said he could not comment on if any employee faced disciplinary action because of the incident.

Mayflower police notified the Arkansas State Police Crimes Against Children Hotline to make a report.

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### **Leader selected for LR schools (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

LITTLE ROCK — The Little Rock School Board on Tuesday selected Dexter Suggs Sr., the chief of staff of Indianapolis Public Schools, to be the next superintendent of the 25,000-student Little Rock School District.

District employees and parents who waited out the board's one-hour-and-45-minute executive session to discuss the four finalists for the job greeted the board's 6-1 vote with a standing ovation.

School Board members called Suggs a good communicator, very bright, upbeat, focused, experienced at different levels within a school district, a clear leader - "the whole package."

Board member Jody Carreiro made the motion to hire Suggs, 44, a national award-winning administrator.

"We have a candidate that the board has rallied behind, a candidate that teachers have rallied behind and a candidate that many parents and other community members have rallied behind," Carreiro said.

Board member Greg Adams said he was grateful for the public's interest and patience in the search process.

"I am so excited," Adams said. "We are ready for a new day in the Little Rock School District and we are going to go with it together. I look forward to every day from this point forward. It is going to be great."

Suggs, a former Persian Gulf War soldier who as a young teenager in St. Louis was both shot and stabbed as the result of gang activity, confirmed in a phone interview Tuesday that he had accepted the job offer. In so doing, he will be leaving the 31,000-student Indianapolis system, where he has worked his entire 19-year education career.

"I'm humbled and honored to be selected," Suggs said. "I'm looking forward to working with the students, the parents, the community and the School Board ... to transform the school district into something very special, something that can be a model for the nation."

"It's going to take time and it's going to take a lot of hard work," he said, "but I think the city of Little Rock and the school district are ready for that kind of transformation for their district."

Suggs saw in Little Rock last week a place that reminded him of Indianapolis, where people show a sincere dedication and passion for education, he said.

"I met a lot of friendly people," he said. "That was just wonderful. It's almost like you are at home."

In the coming days, attorneys for the school district and Suggs will negotiate a contract for the new administrator and agree on a date that he will start work, School Board President Dianne Curry said.

Suggs will succeed Morris Holmes, 73, who has been the district's chief executive since January 2011 but is resigning by March 22 in advance of the June 30 expiration of his contract.

Curry raised the possibility that Suggs might be able to start work in the district earlier than the typical July 1 start date for a new administrator, which would reduce or eliminate the need for appointing an interim superintendent.

Michael Nellums was the only board member to vote against Suggs' employment. He said after the meeting that the largest school district in the state "is not a training ground" and should always have a superintendent who comes into the system with actual experience as a superintendent in a similar size school district.

In an urban district and a district with desegregation issues such as Little Rock, "the learning curve is extraordinarily high," Nellums said.

The other finalists were Connie Hathorn, superintendent in Youngstown, Ohio; Walter Milton Jr., superintendent in Springfield, Ill.; and Stefanie Phillips, a former deputy superintendent in Clayton County, Ga.

As chief of staff in Indianapolis, Suggs facilitates the daily operations of the school system and its approximately 60 schools, including 23 magnet schools.

In meeting with community members and the public last week, Suggs described himself as passionate about education, a “servant” leader in an effort to meet the needs of students, highly visible in all parts of a community, data-driven, a workaholic, a risk-taker and an inspiring, motivating leader who collaborates with others to solve problems.

Suggs described his greatest achievements as both integrating technology into the instructional program and developing a pre-kindergarten program for 1,400 high-need children.

Every high school student in grades nine through 12 in his district has a laptop computer, partly because of a pilot program he initiated at his campus while working as a middle-school principal.

“We are now able to educate our students in a more 24/7 environment,” he said. “We can move beyond the traditional walls of a school to ensure all students are receiving a quality education.”

Cathy Koehler, the president of the Little Rock Education Association, which is the employees union in the district, said Tuesday that she was pleased with Suggs’ selection, calling him a “game-changer” who came into his interviews last week with a strong understanding of the new national education standards that are being put in place in the district and the need for expanded use of computers and other technology in the classrooms.

“I felt like I do whenever I am in the library and get boxes of new books,” said Koehler, who is a library/media specialist. “Every box was a box of promise and hope. I think that is how I think everyone feels at this moment - full of promise and hope about what can happen to move this district forward and to educate all children. He’s a leader in every way he conducted himself. This is a great moment for us.”

Jim Ross, a Little Rock district parent who established a Facebook page devoted to researching the background of the four finalists and urging parents to voice opinions, said Tuesday that he was pleased with the outcome of the search process and the role that the parents and social media played.

“It makes me happy. Parents should be happy that their voices seemed to have mattered here,” Ross said. “Maybe for the first time in a very long time in this district we were able to use social media to organize e-mails and phone calls. We are in charge again. It’s democracy at its best.”

Board members said repeatedly Tuesday that they were grateful to Curry for her work in guiding the superintendent-search process, to the different citizen groups that provided the board with their impressions of the candidates and to members of the public who sent e-mails and made phone calls to the board members.

“Don’t stop,” board member Norma Johnson said to the public. “We want you to be continued to be involved. You were very active in this process and we need you to continue.”

Suggs has a bachelor’s degree in speech communication and education from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, a master’s in curriculum and instruction from Indiana Wesleyan University, a master’s in educational leadership from Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis and a doctorate in education organizational leadership from Indiana Wesleyan.

He and his wife, Shenia - who accompanied him to Little Rock and also has a doctoral degree - have two sons, 15 and 16, and a daughter, 9.

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## **Bill pares double dipping by public employees (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

LITTLE ROCK — An Arkansas lawmaker introduced a bill last week intended to prevent certain elected officials from quickly returning to their posts if they choose to resign.

Senate Bill 420, introduced by Sen. Johnny Key, R-Mountain Home, is a proposed amendment to Arkansas Code Annotated 14-14-1310.

According to the language of the bill, elected officials who resign from office, regardless of reason, may not be reappointed to that office within the term during which they resigned.

Key said Friday that the bill's introduction was, in part, a reaction to the actions of Franklin County Judge Joe Powell, who resigned from office Feb. 28. Powell said in a letter to constituents Feb. 1 that he had to resign temporarily to collect full retirement from the Arkansas Public Employees Retirement System, but that he planned to return to office and finish his term.

The Franklin County Quorum Court appointed Powell's wife, Janet, to the office Feb. 21.

Key said he wants legislation to further discourage the image of public employees "double dipping," or collecting a paycheck at taxpayer expense while simultaneously drawing retirement pay. Powell's apparent intent to return to office after retiring is only the most recent in a string of instances that have drawn public scrutiny and caused state legislators to amend existing laws, increasing the amount of time retired public employees must remain off public payrolls.

Several elected officials drew attention during the summer of 2009 when they attempted to draw retirement benefits without terminating their employment, according to Arkansas Democrat-Gazette reports. About a half-dozen officials in Garland and Desha counties declared themselves retired, removing themselves from the payroll for 90 days but continued to work, unpaid, through the separation period before being added back to county payrolls. The hiatus made them eligible for retirement benefits. Their respective offices were never declared vacant by county administrators, raising questions as to whether their employment was ever actually terminated.

Until 2009, Arkansas Code Annotated 24-4-520 required non-elected state, county and city employees to stay off public payrolls for at least 30 days after retirement. Elected officials were required to take a 90-day separation. A 2009 amendment to the law extended the separation period to six months, and a 2011 amendment extended it to a full year.

Because he entered the Deferred Retirement Option Plan in 2006, Powell is required to stay off the public payroll only for 90 days, Chris Villines, executive director of the Arkansas Association of Counties, has said.

Powell, who was first elected to the office in 1976, said in the letter that state regulations required him to resign before March 1 because of his participation in the deferred retirement plan. Powell implied that he planned to return to the office after a 90-day period.

After the Feb. 21 meeting at which his wife was appointed to the post, Powell said he hadn't decided whether to seek reinstatement in 90 days.

During that same meeting, justices of the peace accepted Powell's resignation, officially declared a vacancy in the position, then voted 8-1 to appoint Janet Powell to fill the vacancy as county judge for the remainder of the term, which expires Dec. 31, 2014. Janet Powell said then that she had no plans to resign her appointment.

Because Janet Powell was appointed to fill the vacancy for the remainder of the term, she is not allowed to run for election to the office in 2014.

SB420 passed in the Senate on Wednesday and was sent to the state House of Representatives, where the bill is being sponsored by Rep. Scott Baltz, D-Pocahontas. According to the state's legislation tracking website, the bill was submitted to the State Agencies and Governmental Affairs Committee.

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### **\$1M award rejected over 2011 Bentonville death (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

Arkansas lawmakers have rejected awarding \$1 million to the family of a 9-year-old killed when an unanchored soccer goal fell on him two years ago.

The Joint Budget Committee on Wednesday failed to advance the award for the family of Jonathan Nelson. A claims subcommittee had recommended the award.

The proposal received 23 votes but needed at least 29 from the 56-member budget panel.

The Department of Finance and Administration opposed the claim, citing the impact it would have on the state's budget.

Jonathan was a fourth-grader at Elm Tree Elementary School in Bentonville when he was killed by the falling soccer goal. His family filed a claim against the Department of Human Services, which licensed an after-school program that operated at the elementary school.